



Towards the 21st Century

by
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IN THIS WEEK'S HRI-POST CO-OPERATION COLUMN, Dr. Chira highlights possible oversights in the new government's policy statement and incites the cabinet to remedy them.

Since the new cabinet has been sworn in with all the new personalities, many interesting policy discussions and new ideas have started to emerge.

First let's look at the government's 46-page policy statement which was debated in Parliament. I have already been on television expressing my views and I would now like to share them with the readers of this column.

It is difficult to expect the new government to produce a policy statement which is completely different from that of the previous government. This is because our national policies aren't based on the specific platforms of particular political parties. That's why the new policy appears similar to the previous one in that it isn't very clearly focused on a vision for the country. The breakdown of the policy statement into 10 sub-topics makes it difficult to prioritise national problems.

Looking to the future, political parties must build up their policy research or 'think tank' capabilities in order to be able to offer several alternative visions to the people. I hope that in the future there will be parties with policies which emphasise such issues as the environment, human resources and the agricultural sector.

Nevertheless, with the Palang Dharma Party in charge, I do at least see a lot of changes in the area of traffic management. The party works in a team and seems to have come up with some good new ideas which have a realistic chance of successful implementation. In addition, the ministers have formed a special 'traffic cabinet' which I also think is an excellent idea.

However, in other areas I do not see much significant change. In terms of economics, the most serious worry concerns fiscal discipline. Inflation is creeping up very quickly, and whether the Banham team is able to provide long term economic stability is still very much in question.

On the other hand, based on his dynamic personality, Khun Banham should be able to mobilise strong support from the private sector. His meeting with the three business associations, the Federation of Thai Industries, the Board of Trade and the Thai Bankers Association, will be a good starting point.

Ever since the Prem administration, cooperation between the government and private sector has not been very strong. Closer consultations would lead to long term development rather than just concentrating on short term issues.

For example, there is a proposal that the business sector set up a national committee chaired by the prime minister to review the minimum wage, but if the business sector wants to push for some changes, they should also push for other issues which would make Thailand more competitive, including education, training and technology transfer.

According to several potential Japanese investors, there are three important reasons why high value-added industries do not move to Thailand in the numbers which we would like, namely; traffic, shortages of skilled and professional manpower, and the lack of a clear cut policy on tax and immigration laws. Wages are certainly part of the equation, but we must adjust other components too if we are to make our reforms work.

Many of my foreign friends are watching the government with great interest. They appreciate the speed and decisiveness with which it was formed, but in the long run they worry about the stability of the economy.

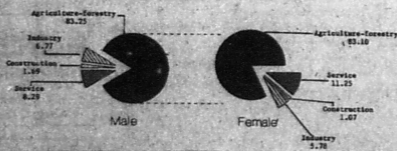
However, I believe that in Thailand what you expect and what you get are not necessarily the same thing. Our society has survived for a long time, and we have proved ourselves capable of surmounting crises and difficulties.

So long as Khun Banham knows how to mobilise the support of good people to advise him and listens to criticisms of academics, foreigners, the press, NGOs and so on, and so long as he recognises his own strengths and weaknesses and concentrates on the former, then I am sure he will be able to play a positive role. This is his big chance to show what he can do for the country.

This week we have the honour of publishing the insights of an active member of the new government, Deputy Prime Minister Amnuay Virawan, into management and human resources. He too has an important role to play in determining the future direction of Thailand. We should take note of what he says.

See you next week!

EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE IN VIETNAM RURAL AREA (%)



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